

Status Report
Midwest Regional Rail Passenger Initiative and Passenger Rail Service in Iowa
February 1, 2009

This report is submitted as required per Code of Iowa section 327J.3(5), "The director shall report annually to the general assembly concerning the development and operation of the midwest regional rail system and the state's passenger rail service."

Passenger Rail in Iowa

The Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), working with Iowa cities, planning organizations, advocacy groups, and the Iowa Transportation Commission, has developed a new vision for passenger rail in Iowa. This vision will create a passenger rail network that connects Iowans to each other and the country, and makes Iowa a more attractive place to live, work and visit.

In 2008, Iowa DOT formed a Passenger Rail Advisory Committee whose members are helping shape the vision for passenger rail service in the state. The immediate goal in the first phase of the vision is to achieve passenger rail service from Iowa City to Chicago and Dubuque to Chicago. A funding request for \$3 million for passenger rail funding is included in the Iowa DOT's FY 2010 program funding request. This funding would go toward intercity passenger rail infrastructure improvements and allow Iowa to compete for, and match, federal funding.

Passenger Rail Studies:

Iowa DOT is involved with studies for expanded passenger rail service, for both individual routes (Amtrak route feasibility studies) and for a larger regional system in the Midwest (Midwest Regional Rail Initiative).

Amtrak route feasibility studies

Amtrak completed feasibility studies for service between Chicago and Dubuque in June 2007, for service between Chicago and the Quad Cities in January 2008, and an addendum to the Chicago to Quad Cities study that extended the analysis of service on to Iowa City in April 2008. These routes will provide passenger rail connections to and from Chicago for Iowans. Iowa DOT is coordinating with Amtrak, Illinois DOT, local communities and the host railroads on the development of these routes.

In summer 2007, Iowa DOT requested an Amtrak feasibility study that would expand the analysis of the Chicago to Iowa City study to include service on to Des Moines. In summer 2008, Iowa DOT requested an Amtrak feasibility study that would expand the analysis of the Chicago to Dubuque study to include service on to Waterloo. These studies are anticipated to be received from Amtrak in 2009 or later.

Iowa DOT has met with communities along these proposed routes, including Dubuque, Quad Cities, Iowa City, and Des Moines. Iowa DOT will update the Iowa Rail Plan in 2009 and identify state and local needs for a future program.

Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI)

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) is a nine-state effort to develop an implementation plan for a 3,000-mile, high-speed rail system hubbed in Chicago. Studies completed since 1996 have concluded that such a regional system, including a line from Chicago to Omaha through Davenport, Iowa City and Des Moines, is viable. Most of the system would be upgraded to allow 110 mile-per-hour service. The Iowa portion of the line would be upgraded for 79 mile-per-hour service.

The nine-state coalition released an updated 2004 executive report for the system. As reported, the updated cost estimate for the Chicago to Omaha corridor, which includes a branch to Quincy, Ill., is \$638 million for infrastructure and \$167 million for rolling stock. These costs are given in 2002 dollars (not adjusted for the cost of inflation). Operating subsidies would be required during an extended start-up phase. The allocation of these subsidy costs among the various states has not been determined and is still a subject for analysis and negotiation. Participation of the Iowa DOT in the MWRRI is authorized under Iowa Code section 327J.3.

The ongoing work of the nine-state MWRRI steering committee is currently focusing on:

- Further efforts of system planning by updating and refining key MWRRI plan elements and public information materials.
- Developing support and advocating for a federal program to provide funding for passenger rail initiatives.

The MWRRI states participate in a variety of regional and national outreach activities to encourage congressional support for a dedicated, federal passenger rail funding program. The states have cooperated with a number of passenger rail support groups, including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, States for Passenger Rail Coalition, and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. All of these support groups recognize that a strong state and federal funding partnership is essential to the development of a national passenger rail system.

Other MWRRI states are proceeding with studies and developing funding mechanisms to be ready for federal funds. These steps will also be required for the development of Iowa's portion of the system.

To date, Iowa funds have not been appropriated for system engineering, design, environmental assessment, construction, or operation. A copy of the recently released *Midwest Regional Rail System, Executive Report, September 2004*, is available at www.iowarail.com.

Federal Funding

The 2008 federal omnibus appropriations bill provided a capital program for the states in the amount of \$30 million. This is the first capital funding available to the states for passenger rail service. The MWRRI received a grant for \$297,000, awarded September 30, 2008, to support their ongoing work described in the previous section. Iowa was part of the multi-state application for the grant from the Federal Railroad Administration.

In October 2008, H.R. 2095 was signed. This is the Rail Safety/Amtrak Reauthorization bill. This bill authorizes \$1.9 billion for an intercity passenger rail grant program. States will need to apply to the Federal Railroad Administration for competitive grants for funding. This is an 80 percent federal and 20 percent state program and states will need to have a funding source identified for the state match in order to apply. At this time, funding has not been appropriated for the program so applications have not yet been solicited.